



Migraine Relief through Acupuncture

by Shoshanna Katzman

According to the Migraine Research Foundation, more than 4 million people have chronic daily migraines and at least fifteen days with a migraine per month. Furthermore, they have reported that 90% of migraine sufferers are unable to work or function normally during a migraine episode. In western medicine, migraines are classified as a neurological disorder, whereby the brain becomes hyper-excitable to triggers such as emotional or physical stress, anxiety, fatigue, lack of sleep, hormonal imbalance, changes in weather, alcohol consumption, missing a meal as well as food sensitivities.

Migraine episodes happen without warning, last for hours or even days, get worse with activity and are accompanied by nausea, vomiting and sensitivity to light or noise. It is typical for them to occur on one side of the head and be accompanied by throbbing or pulsating with a moderate to severe level of pain. Some migraine sufferers also experience a distinctive warning sign, known as an aura. This can be sensory, motor, verbal or visual in nature; however the visual

type is most common. Fortunately, acupuncture provides an alternative treatment option for migraine sufferers, one that can be used alone or integrated with western medical treatment. Additional Chinese medicine techniques that can prove beneficial include Chinese herbal medicine, dietary therapy, lifestyle recommendations, qigong and tai chi.

Acupuncture treatment is used to allay painful symptoms during a migraine attack and to reduce frequency and intensity of future episodes. A recent study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) found acupuncture to significantly reduce the frequency of migraine attacks, along with long-term reduction in migraine recurrence. This conclusion was reached after a 24 week randomized clinical trial that evaluated the effect of four weeks of acupuncture treatment for 249 patients from 18 to 65 years of age with migraine without aura.

According to the Chinese medicine method, an acupuncturist chooses treatment based upon an assessment of an individual's presenting physical symp-

toms and signs combined with their particular energetic imbalance. This is a holistic approach which includes physical, emotional, energetic and spiritual factors - with treatment focused on reducing the underlying cause to obtain amelioration of symptoms. For migraines, the main objective is often to restore proper flow of qi (vital energy) and blood within the body, while simultaneously releasing any blockages and stagnation.

One of the predominant reasons for this treatment focus is that all of the yang meridians (energy pathways) of the body meet at the head. The qi and blood of the vital organs also flows upward to the head, thus creating a strong connection between the head and the remainder of the body. This also means that the head is impacted by the energetic health of the vital organs. Optimal flow throughout the 12 primary meridian pathways is thus essential for proper nourishment of the head and vibrant health.

An acupuncturist combines information gathered through a comprehensive initial consultation and combines it with tongue and pulse diagnostic techniques along with assessment of the location, onset, time and pain type of the migraines in terms of its association with a specific meridian system. In many cases, it is the energetics of the liver meridian that is particularly important to treat in order to re-establish and maintain proper flow of qi and blood to the head.

A migraine stemming from a liver imbalance would typically be located on the temporal region of the head. This is because the gall bladder meridian traverses the temples and is directly associated with the liver. The specific treatment principle to rebalance liver energetics would be to calm the liver energy, unblock stagnation of liver qi and release any pathogens causing obstruction of the liver such as invasion of external wind. It is also important for a migraine sufferer to support this process by working to release pent-up anger as it is the emotion related to the liver. Moreover, it is highly recommended that one continue to express their emotions to prevent future buildup of anger.

Another predominant cause of migraines stems from deficiency of the energetics of the kidney. This pattern of energetic disharmony is associated

with overwork, over indulgence sexually, deficient sleep and excessive fear and fright. A migraine caused by kidney imbalance would typically be experienced while resting and located on the nape of the neck. This is because the urinary bladder meridian traverses this area of the head and is directly related with the kidneys. Acupuncture treatment would focus on strengthening the qi of the kidneys as the underlying cause of the migraines.

Acupuncture treatment provides huge potential, especially when nothing else has been able to help. A patient should know within eight treatments whether it's working, which means that there will be a reasonable degree of improvement. It is a painless experience, one that induces a deep state of relaxation and healing, and is highly recommended as a natural method for accessing one's innate healing capability.

Shoshanna Katzman, L.Ac., M.S., is the author of Qigong for Staying Young, co-author of Feeling Light and the director of the Red Bank Acupuncture & Wellness Center in Shrewsbury, NJ. For more information, visit www.healing4u.com



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